

# Race and Ethnicity

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We can describe **race** as having to do with physical characteristics. Anything that has to do with the way a person looks like in their physical appearances and traits. In Canada we do not often hear or use the concept of race when we speak about identity, because Canada's population is highly multicultural, and people of all races, skin colour, shape of eyes and physical traits are found everywhere.

Canada's racial differences are not as easily distinguishable. In other words: Canadians may not immediately relate a person's identity tightly tied to one's racial features.

Is there a difference between the understanding and use of the concept of race between Canada and the US?

We come to realize that up to a few years back, the situation in the US was such that visibly there were two dominant races in the population: people with very light skin colour (whites) and people with very dark skin colour (blacks). This may be a reason why often the word and concept of race is more prominent in the US than in Canada.

This simple comparison can help you consider the importance of **context**. Even when we speak of the same concept and use the same words, we may attribute different perspectives and values to these words. This can impact our ability to truly communicate with one another.

Then, what is ethnicity?

We can describe **ethnicity** as what makes up the cultural background of an individual. This may include: religious values, traditions, language, culture, country of origin, etc.

- Can you think of other differences between race and ethnicity?
- How can understanding these differences help you in your everyday communication in healthcare workplaces?
- Can you think of an example when race and/or ethnicity have impacted a patient/nurse relationship? To you personally or to someone you know? Share your story in the discussion room.